

Mourning

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765 When a man dies, the widow has to seclude herself from all for a period of four months and ten days. Well-to-do families confine the wife to the house for this period while Badawin women hide themselves as much as practicable in their tents. The townswoman of Kuwait actually shuts herself in a room, devoid of comforts such as carpets, etc., and can only be attended by another woman who brings her food and water. She must not see a man, or male relative, or hear a male voice.

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765 Among the lower classes the belief about this 'ada or custom of shutting the widow up is, that as soon as a man dies and goes to the other world, he is chained by an iron chain round his neck. This chain can only be removed by his widow's observing a proper course of mourning, for four months and ten days.

The very poor classes in Kuwait do not pay much attention to the above rule, and forty days' seclusion generally meets the case with them.

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766 Graveyards are always looked upon as places of ill-omen and must be avoided, especially at night, as *jinn* or spirits are believed to be moving about them.

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766 The great western graveyard at Kuwait, where the shaikhs bury their dead, is especially notorious for *jinn*, and many an eerie tale is told of people who have dared to go too near the place and have been pursued and even attacked by these evil spirits.

It is particularly bad to put your foot on a grave, and to do so after dark often results in so-called "madness". When young Muthag bin Majid al A'aga of the Mutair at Jariya went mad for the love of a lady (see page 149) many said, and he himself is supposed to have believed, that he had accidentally set foot on a Badawin grave when he went out of his tent after dark to attend to nature.

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761 Among the Badawin the person dying usually passes away peacefully in grave and dignified manner; this especially applies to the old. I was present at the death of one of Shaikh Hilal bin Fajr'an al Muniri's Badawin relatives, a poor man of over eighty. I was camped at Arnafjan among my Badawin friends Salim al Muzayyin's family, and the old man's tent was close by. Salim was away in Najd when the old man suddenly collapsed and gave out that his time had come. There were only women and children about and the Dhafiri camel

Death-Bed Scenes

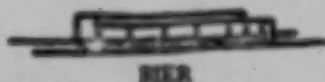
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herdsmen. These and me the old man called around him, and after making the women prop him up in a sitting posture, he began to bid each person farewell in simple and quiet manner. He then addressed himself to me and asked me to give his salaams to Salim, Hissal al Mutairi, Shaikh Ahmad, Shaikh 'Abdullah al Salim, and others whom I did not know; he also sent messages to my wife and to my son Sa'ud. He then asked for a cup of coffee. After drinking it he lay down, closed his eyes and just ceased to breathe. His farewells, *balagh salami 'ala Hissal, wa 'ala Ahmad al Jalir*, etc., were simple and fine.

After his death Shaikh 'Abdullah al Salim, who was camped a mile off, sent his servants to wash and bury the old man. This was considered a good and generous act, for of course the women could not do this.

I was not a little moved by this simple death-bed scene of the desert, which reminded me of the Old Testament. No doubt Abraham died thus, sending messages to all and sundry up to the very last.

In Kuwait and in other Muslim towns, when a corpse is being carried to the cemetery for burial, any person lending a hand and assisting in shouldering the bier, a sort of open stretcher affair,



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derives great merit. So at a funeral procession it is usual to see men changing places rapidly and often, each anxious to shoulder the bier for a short time.

Townswomen go off the deep end in truly alarming style when a relative dies. They tear their hair, beat their heads and breasts and rend their garments in a manner which is quite incomprehensible to us. This is partly due to the more emotional nature of the Arab woman, and partly because it is considered the right thing to do.

I have seen some women fall down and have to be carried away apparently bereft of all sense and reason, so grief-stricken have they been. When her brother-in-law was killed in a well whose sides fell in and crushed him (September 1933) our servant-girl Hamda even tore out her gold earrings and broke her gold bracelets and flung

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765 them away without knowing that she had done so. The neighbours' and onlookers' opinion of the bereaved woman rises in proportion to the amount of grief and emotion she displays.

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765 The women of the desert, and especially those living in or on the borderland of Wahhabi-land (Sa'udi Arabia), act in exactly the reverse manner. I have already described the scene when Sārah bint Junaifir, who had just lost her small boy, greeted us with a laugh and smile as she pointed to the newly dug grave thirty feet away. It was not because she did not feel—she did keenly—but it was against the strict Wahhabi tenets to mourn her dead.

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764 In the desert the grave is dug usually to a depth of four feet, not more. At the bottom a nook is hollowed out in the side of the grave to take the body, the idea being not to crush it with earth as the grave is filled in. The body having been placed in the nook, brushwood is next filled in up against the body, after which the grave is filled in with sand.



Should the Badawin family be able to afford it, they will, as I have said, wash the body and clothe it in a new piece of white cotton cloth. Should they be far from water, and unable to afford the shroud, they will just bury it unwashed or unshrouded. If a Mutawwa's (priest) is at hand, they will request him to hold a simple service over the dead; if not, no service is said.

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764 No monuments nor even headstones are placed on graves in the desert, only a slight heap of earth, eight inches above the level of the ground. In Kuwait, and in Najd towns and villages generally, a rough piece of stone is placed at the head and feet, usually a piece of uncut coral or lump of lava. This not so much to mark the grave as to prevent other persons being buried on the same spot; for wind and rain rapidly wear away the low mounds of earth which mark a grave.

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767 Once a person is buried in the desert, relatives never visit the grave. Wahhabi influence is so strong in Kuwait that no one ever goes to

Unmarked Graves

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visit the grave of a dead relative once he has been buried. Even the ⁶²⁹shaikhs' graves suffer like neglect, and in the great cemetery between the Naif gate and the Jahrah gate (inside the wall, few can point out the graves of Shaikhs Mubarak, Jabir and Salim, the last three Rulers of the principality. There is nothing at all to distinguish their tombs from those of any man and woman who has been buried in the same place. It is interesting to know that Shaikha Muhammad and Jarrah, slain by Shaikh Mubarak, lie in the *Sajir* or Market Square of Kuwait with nothing to indicate their burial place but a few stones flush with the ground.

The washing of dead bodies in Kuwait is carried out by a regular ^kbody-washer (*ghasaf*), male or female as the case may be, who is ⁷⁰⁴immediately sent for on a death taking place. This person is very business-like and gets to work at once. Persian (*Shi'ah*) men are washed in a room adjoining the mosque, while women are taken to special buildings provided for this purpose. The body-washer places the nude body on a large wooden table and pours water over it in quantities. Then with a gauntlet of coarse wool which he puts on his hands, he scrubs the corpse all over with soap and water, scouring it over and over again with copious douches of water. After this procedure he dries the body well, and dresses it up in its new white cotton shroud, or perhaps enlists members of the family to do this. For preference the washing is done after dark, but this is not obligatory.

Among the Bedouin when a woman's husband dies, the widow ⁷⁰⁵keeps herself shut up in her tent, and wears a green undergarment. ²¹²She goes out only when all strange men are out of sight; she must cover her hands and feet with a sort of glove and sock when she moves with her family; this is known as *haddad* or *haddin* (*shaddad* or *shaddin*—she is mourning).

OTHER INTERESTING POINTS CONNECTED WITH A BADAWIN DEATH ⁷⁰⁶

- (a) In the desert water is usually dropped into the mouth of a person ⁷⁰⁷about to die. ⁷⁰⁹
- (b) The eyes of the dead person are not closed as in the West.
- (c) The Bedouin greatly dislikes having to bury his own dead. If he can, he will get some non-Bedouin, a so-called Arab for instance, if one is

The Badawin Paradise

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764 at hand, to do the work for him. Similarly, to touch a dead body is revolting to him.

- (d) A woman's grave must be deep enough to hide her breasts if she were placed upright.
- (e) A man's grave need be only 4 feet deep, i.e. up to a man's middle, or his knees, if there is no time to bury him properly.
- (f) No woman ever accompanies a dead man's funeral procession, and as few persons as possible attend any actual burial. This is unlike the *Kashir* (town) custom, when friends all go to see a man buried, and vie with each other to carry the body, if only for a few seconds.
- 725 (g) Up to the third day after a man's death his friends visit his son and console with him by quoting various regular forms of comforting phrases,* such as: "He was a good man, and this has happened from Allah." "It happens to all men and to all people born of woman." "May Allah replace him who has passed away." If a man has lost his son the words "may Allah grant you another son in his place", etc., *Allah yakkil* "Allah can do it" are used. The man consoled with will reply, "Thanks be to Allah, Allah is omnipotent".

The Badawin's idea of Heaven or Paradise is simple and pleasing and I have often discussed this subject with him.

772 Paradise means to him a land where it is always spring (*rohi*),
775 with plentiful and permanent green grazing (*asid*), water flowing in abundance from springs and small rivulets, a place where no unpleasant things are met with such as are prevalent in this world (hunger, lack of water, dried-up pasture, camel disease, etc.).

In Paradise all a man's tribe live together in pastures green, he meets all his friends and relations. No one grows old—all live for ever. They marry and give in marriage, and every person has an extra large tent, large herds of camels and sheep and many children. Should a person have lost children in this world, he or she will meet them in Paradise, grown to the age they would have been if they had lived, and the children will welcome and greet their parents as at the end of a journey.

I once asked Amalia, wife of Salim al Musaiyin, if she would be Salim's wife in heaven, as she was here. She replied that she would know him and her children, and live close to him, and visit her children

* Such formulas of consolation are: (1) *Allah i'rahim qadim* (when grown up has died, such as a son); (2) *Allah yakkil qadim* (for child's death); (3) *Allah i'rahim qadim* (for women).